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ABSTRACT

The assumption that question-answer sequences consist of two moves was examined using data from recordings of second-grade classrooms in Austin, Texas. Interactions initiated by children's spontaneous questions in informal, small group settings were evaluated. Twenty-nine dialogue samples are presented and analyzed. Four issues in the study of interaction are discussed: the selection of data for analysis, the use of "null set" in discourse, recognition of a "notable absence," and the usefulness of a two-move unit for describing events in conversation. The data indicate that answers are negotiated, and that three moves, rather than two, are required to accomplish an inquiry sequence: a question, a reply, and an evaluation. The status of a reply as answer or nonanswer is not determined until a questioner contributes his evaluation. A replier therefore does not know how his reply fits into an on-going conversation until the questioner reacts to it. (SW)

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Children's Negotiation of Answers To Questions

by

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RELEVANCE TO EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Many educational problems in recent years have been attributed, in part at least, to differences in communicative style, expectations, and interpretation between students and teachers. It has been pointed out that students' perceptions of classroom reality may differ sharply from those of adult participants in the same events. The conversations studied in this paper are examined for evidence of what participants in classroom interactions perceive to be happening. One goal of interaction in the classroom is to learn more about how speakers perceive and direct the course of a conversation.

Study of how communication is accomplished in classrooms has revealed that interaction between teachers and students is more subtle, more complex, and more systematically structured than had previously been recognized. The surprise expressed by researchers and by teachers at the rich and intricate kinds of interaction that average, ordinary children construct on a regular day-to-day basis suggests that children's linguistic sophistication and their ability to comprehend complex relationships may sometimes be critically underestimated. A second goal of studies of classroom interaction, therefore, is to develop an appreciation for the verbal skills that children demonstrate, for the observational and analytical abilities that accompany those skills, and for the ways children learn those skills and teach them to each other.

CHILDREN'S NEGOTIATION OF ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Beth Driver

Common sense tells us that a question normally initiates a conversational exchange consisting of two parts: a question and an answer. Such interchanges are a fundamental conversational pattern in our society. They are cited as canonical examples of adjacency pairs and of conditional relevance. Both the notion of adjacency pairs and that of conditional relevance have been developed to account for relatedness between two utterances in converation; thus, both are based on the assumption that a two-part exchange is the appropriate unit of analysis for the study of conversation. Erving Goffman has investigated kinds of relatedness between successive utterances. He defines an adjacency pair as a couplet in which the first utterance is oriented to an anticipated response. The next utterance is seen to answer the first in some way (Goffman 1976). The moves within such a pair are conditionally relevant. The first creates a conversational slot in which the second is expected. Interpretation of the second is dependent upon knowledge of the first. If nothing is said in the second slot, the silence is "notable." The notion of conditional relevance is introduced in the work of Sacks and Schegloff (Sacks 1972, Schegloff 1972a, 1972b). In their work, conditional relevance characterizes a relationship between utterances that may be adjacent or separated by other talk.

Students of interactions opened by questions have assumed that the interchanges consist of a questioning move and an answering move (Mischler 1975, 1974, nd; Ervin-Tripp 1970; Dore 1977), and that a question calls for an answer. The classroom conversations of second grade children support the assumption that people expect answers to questions. The absence of a reply or answer is notable, and children have ways to deal with such an absence.

This paper examines the assumption that question-answer sequences consist of two moves. The data presented below indicate that answers are negotiated, and that three moves, rather than two, are required to accomplish an inquiry sequence: a question, a reply, and an evaluation.* The status of a reply as answer or nonanswer is not determined until a questioner contributes his evaluation; thus, a replier does not know how his reply fits into an on-going conversation until the questioner reacts to it.

Data for this study, tape-recorded in classrooms in Austin, Texas,** consist of interactions initiated by children's spontaneous questions. Most of the interactions occur in informal, small group settings with the children working on the floor or at small tables.

The study of the talk of children can and should contribute to a general understanding of conversation. Children are a significant minority in society, and a general account of communication within a culture will account for their interaction as well as that of adults. The talk of children can be expected to exhibit many features common to adult speech, along with significant differences from adult talk.

One of the earliest features of communication to be learned is that the order of events in interaction is meaningful. Interaction with young children is highly dependent on the order of events; moreover, interpretation of early utterances is based on the assumption that the child is using a sequential framework compatible with that of adults. In order to make himself

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*Talk other than questions, replies, and evaluations also occurs in inquiry sequences; however, it is not crucial to our sense of a completed event in the way that the moves discussed here are. Such talk frequently occurs in insertions, or side-sequences, that deal with whether to proceed with the inquiry sequence or how to do so. Such responses will be discussed in this paper only as they bear on the three-step sequence. For additional discussion of other talk in inquiry sequences, see Driver 1977.

**I would like to thank Southwest Educational Development Laboratory for assistance in the collection and transcription of data.

understood a child must learn to conform to the organizational framework others use to interpret what he says. Thus, the study of children's conversation can provide important information about the structure of adult interaction.

The analysis presented below bears on four issues in the study of interaction: the selection of data for analysis, the use of Ø in discourse, recognition of a "notable absence," and the usefulness of a two-move unit for describing events in conversation.

Before examining the data, I want to discuss terminology briefly. "Question" is an everyday term for sentences having interrogative syntax and for utterances that function as requests for information.* I will use "question" to refer to moves initiating the sequences studied here. The children's questions are usually treated as requests for information, even when other meanings may also be recognizable. In most cases they also have interrogative syntax. A reply is a recognizable attempt to provide the information requested, and an answer is the propositional content accepted by the questioner and recognizable to an observer as "the answer" participants

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*The terms "inquiry" and "query" might also be used. "Inquiry" is a somewhat broader term than "question." It may refer to a speech event or ritual occasion such as a coroner's inquiry. "Inquiry" does not imply the necessity of obtaining the information sought in the way that "question" does. One can "have an inquiry" or "make inquiries" without making it specific what information is sought. An inquiry may result in obtaining information but arriving at no answers. "Inquiry" refers to an intent or purpose rather than to a linguistic form, and it may or may not mean a specific move. "Query" is used in written English and in more formal speech, but seldom occurs in everyday talk, nor is it often used by children.

Because "inquiry" refers to the larger event, and "question" refers to an individual move (both its form and its function), I use "inquiry sequence" to refer to the sequence described here and "question" to refer to the move initiating the sequence and to the slot it is seen to fill.

agree to. A reply is a kind of move, whereas an answer is a product or result that is recognizable only after the fact. Sometimes several replies may be used to present information later seen as a single answer. On occasion the propositional content of either a reply or an answer may not be verbalized.

Two kinds of evidence are pertinent to the claim that questions and answers are conditionally relevant: the expectations of members of the speech community, and the events that occur in conversations where conditional relevance is a factor. The first underlies the intuitively appealing notion of adjacency pairs and other studies of question-answer sequences. Conversational data, however, provide additional evidence that the children expect questions to be answered. In the first place, most questions are answered, sooner or later. When no reply is offered, the talk that does occur indicates that a reply is expected; a questioner, for example, may reiterate his question. Both the appropriateness of the reiteration and the forms used to realize it offer evidence that a reply is the unmarked response. The children rarely use linguistic forms that suggest a replier ignored a question; they prefer forms that permit the interpretation that the replier is cooperative, and that either the question or the response may not have been understood, even when contextual information may make it evident that a replier has deliberately not responded.

Such behavior indicates that participants expect each other to know the expected order of moves for the sequence; moreover, to intimate that a participant not know what to do next or that he is deliberately being recalcitrant would apparently be highly marked behavior, possibly necessitating remediation.

Another kind of evidence that questions demand answers consists of the fact that the children consistently justify the absence of a reply in terms of a limited set of appropriateness considerations. When a replier offers a reason for not replying, the questioner has an opportunity to reestablish the hearer's obligation to reply. Either the questioner accepts the reason, or he reasserts that the condition obtains. A question, then, is expected to elicit a reply unless participants negotiate a justification of its absence. Failure of an appropriateness condition to obtain is a situational factor speakers can use to neutralize an obligation to reply.

The frequency with which questions elicit replies and the behavior of participants when no reply is forthcoming demonstrate that participants regard a reply as the unmarked response to a question. Non-reply talk elicited by questions also provides evidence that a reply is the most expected or desired response.

It is commonly assumed that question-answer sequences consist of two moves. Analysis of actual speech, however, indicates that a third move, an evaluation, is essential to an inquiry sequence. An evaluation

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*It is noteworthy that the children do not interact on the premise that appropriateness conditions must be met before a reply is made. No apologies or other remediations for inappropriate questions are offered; moreoever, children reply to questions when appropriateness conditions are acknowledged not to obtain (see Driver 1977). The claim that silence is an appropriate response to an inappropriate question (Lakoff 1973) is not supported by the data. When a question does not elicit a response, the questioner is likely to become more insistent, eliminating potential excuses for not replying.

does two things: it acknowledges performance of a reply,* and it reveals the questioner's degree of acceptance or satisfaction** with a reply. Thus, an evaluation is a questioner's contribution to the negotiation of a mutually-accepted answer. It contains essential information regarding how an offered reply relates to what will eventually be "the answer" to a question.

Failure to consider subsequent conversation in analyzing a question-initiated exchange can lead an observer to perceive a different answer than what participants agree on. Such an approach might, for example, lead to the conclusion that the answer in the sequence below is contained in the fieldworker's response.***

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*An evaluation presupposes a reply as demonstrated by situations where the listener can hear only the questioner, yet infer that a reply has been offered; for instance, hearing only one party to a telephone conversation, or the following excerpt:

C Are you comin'?
Okay, you're comin'.

The child's "okay" is evaluative. We understand "you're comin'" to be an accepting statement of a reply attributable to another speaker. When an evaluation is performed without a verbal reply having occurred, the unwarranted evaluation may be a comment on the absence of a reply; however, no such cases occur in the data studied here.

**The notion of "satisfaction" used here is highly context-sensitive and refers to an evaluation of the usefulness of the reply to the questioner, not necessarily an assessment of the content of the reply as positive or negative.

***The following symbols are used in the transcribed data:

C	Child
T	Teacher
A	Adult
FW	Fieldworker
( )	Unintelligible talk
(probably)	Some uncertainty as to the accuracy of the transcription
(this/that)	Speaker said either X or Y
UPPER CASE	Contrastive stress
#	Pause in the dialogue
→	Utterance discussed in the text

(1) C1 How much did it [the tape recorder] cost?
FW It cost a lot. ( )

(2sh, 3-11, 17)

Examination of a longer excerpt, however, leads to the conclusion that the answer is "two hundred dollars," information introduced by the questioner and verified nonverbally by the fieldworker:

(2) C1 How much did it cost?
FW It cost a lot. ( )
C1 'bout a hundred dollars?
FW Hmmm. No, more than that.
C1 Oh.
C2 A thousand?
FW Nooo.
[laugh]
C2 Less.
→ C1 Two hundred?
#
C1 Goll.

(2sh, 3-11, 17)

A variety of forms is used to show acceptance of a reply. In example (3) the teacher accepts the child's reply as a plausible answer with "Oh," then, by requesting verification of the child's knowledge, expresses some doubt as to the truth of the reply. The teacher accepts the offered reply as a possible answer, but indicates that she is not wholly satisfied with it.

(3) T You don't need that.
What do you use that for?
C Because there's no more (number lines).
T Oh.
Are you sure?
C Yes.
T I need to find you a (number line).
That's gonna take too long.

(2sh, 2-21, 1-2)

Likewise, "oh," in (4) and (5) signals acceptance of offered replies, without necessarily indicating satisfaction with them. On the contrary, "oh," suggests the questioner may have expected or hoped for a different reply.

(4) C1 What are you writing?
FW Just some notes.
→ C1 (Oh) Is it fun?
FW Mmmmm?

(2 sh, 3-5, 9)

(5) C1 Can I git another reader?
T When you finish that one.
→ C1 Oh.
..... [end of exchange]

(2 sh, 3-11, 5)

"Oh" in the excerpts above contrasts with "okay" in (6), which occurs shortly after (3).

(6) T How many units did you use (when you)
[. . . child counting]
T Seven?
C Wait. Eight.
→ T Okay. Now count those.

(2sh, 2-21, 2)

The teacher signals acceptance of the child's revised reply and her satisfaction with it, then begins a new sequence.

C2 uses "okay" to show her satisfaction with the reply in the following sequence. Her use of "then" suggests that her further talk depends on information obtained in the inquiry sequence.

(7) C2 You know, Kim goes--Kim goes
#
C2 Is it on now?
C Yeah.
→ C2 Okay, (then) I'm gonna say this.
See, Kim goes, um, um, um, um,
"It's sticking (on your head/under here)."
C3 [giggle]
C That's funny.

. . . [end of exchange]

(2sh, 3-11, 30-31)

"Oh" and "okay" may occur together, e.g.,

(8) C2 Would you play somethin' that we said?
FW Yeah. In a little bit remind me 'n I'll go back 'n play them for ( ).
→ C2 Oh, okay.
. . . [end of exchange] . . .

(2 sh, 3-11, 9)

"Oh" conveys acceptance while "okay" expresses something of C2's attitude toward the reply.

The children use expletives to react to a reply; e.g.,

(9) C1 Angie, do you know how much this cost?
C4 How much?
C1 This. Two hundred dollars.
→ C4 Gee. How did you get that much money?
FW Hmmm?
C4 How did you get that much money?
FW I worked 'n I saved it.
C1 How much money do you have?
FW None, now. I spent it all on the tape recorder.
→ C1 Oh goll man. That's a lotta money to spend. I would took it. How much did you have when you didn't spend it?

(2 sh, 3-11, 34)

(10) C You write all that what I said?
FW Uh huh.
→ C Rats.

(2sh, 3-14, 6)

The expletives convey acceptance, while also serving as a comment on the reply.

When there is no verbal evaluation, participants treat the reply as accepted. There is no move to amend or change the reply, and its content is treated by participants as shared knowledge. The offered reply stands as "the answer." Ø is common in the evaluation slot in situations where an inquiry sequence is used to obtain information pertinent to an activity

that does not involve the replier or where another activity is of primary concern to the questioner, as in situations where the inquiry sequence is embedded in an on-going sequence. The children in the following excerpts accept the replies and immediately resume their work. The teacher is helping the child with an arithmetic problem.

(11) T All right add those up for me.
C You mean both o' those?
T Mmm hmm. All of those.
T Don't forget your one.
. . . [Silence while the child does the problem] . . .

(2 sh, 3-13, 4)

(12) C What's that word?
FW ( )
. . . [Child resumes reading] . . .

(2 sh, 3-11, 5)

In each instance the child has the opportunity to speak again, but makes no attempt to extend the interaction. The reply is seen as satisfactory.

In the following exchange C1 asks about the shoulder guard on a tape recorder. C1's second utterance is not relatable in form or content to the previous talk. The new topic introduced by C1 indicates C1's acceptance of the reply in the previous exchange. By initiating a new exchange, C1 signals that the evaluation has taken the null form.

(13) C1 How comes this is so big?
FW So that I can hang it on my shoulder.
#
→ C1 If you want ( ) you have to push that button ( ).
(2sh, 3-11, 41)

Questioners often employ Ø when the information requested is accessible only through the replier, for example, information about the replier himself or his intentions, or, in many cases, requests for repetition.

The fact that it is unnecessary to acknowledge and accept replies directly in these contexts suggests that the children usually succeed in communicating what they want. The frequent use of Ø in the evaluation

slot reflects the commonsense notion of "tacit acceptance."* It also provides evidence that acceptance is the unmarked feature for the slot.

When a child requests information pertinent to other work he is engaged in, he may resume his work using the information obtained. Use of the information conveys satisfaction with it, as in (14). The child is reading.

(14) C ( ) word is that?
A Hmmm?
C Is that word ( )?
A "They."
C [d] [an] [sh]
A "Dangerous"
C Dangerous and the brown brown?
A "Branch"
C Branch # broke
A "Breaks"
C Breaks you # called?
A "Could"
C Could be swimming?
A "Swept"
C Swept over?
A Good.

(2 sh, 2-20, 20-22)

There are interactions in which acceptance of a reason for not replying also signals agreement to an implied answer. The position and propositional content of the teacher's question in (15), along with the fact that the matrix sequence terminates, imply that students must finish their work before a request such as the one made here is appropriate. The request is denied without

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*The use of Ø to show approval might at first seem strange in light of Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) observation that a teacher's failure to evaluate a child's reply verbally is regarded as a negative evaluation and elicits more replies from the children. Differences in the goals of these interactions and in the relative status of questioner and replier, however, help to explain the difference. Teacher questions are often intended to permit the child to demonstrate knowledge to the teacher. The child is presumed not to know the answer until it is shown that he does. In the interactions discussed above the situation is reversed. The replier--not the questioner--is expected to know the answer. In both cases, Ø conveys that the normal expectations are seen to be met.

the teacher verbalizing the refusal.*

(15) C Do we have to do this ( )?
→ T Have you finished your work?
C This one?
T Uhmm mmmm.
C No.

(2 sh, 3-16, 17)

The child's acceptance of this condition on his request and the implicit denial are demonstrated by the absence of further attempts to elicit a reply to the child's first question and by the child's completion of the assignment. This dialog may be represented

(16) Q1 Do we have to do this ( )?
Q2 Have you finished your work?
Q3 This one?
R3 Umm hmm.
E3 Ø [acceptance]
R2 No.
E2 Ø [acceptance]
R1 [implicit denial]
E1 Ø [acceptance]

Thus, it is possible for requests for permission to have implicit content in both the reply and evaluation slots.

Two kinds of negative evaluations occur: rejections and statements of dissatisfaction. The grounds for rejection of a reply are more fixed and less flexible in interpretation than the grounds for dissatisfaction. Rejections are based on the truth value of a reply and on context-specific conditions the questioner expects the replier to follow. I will discuss first the forms used to convey rejection, then the criteria used.

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*The denial depends on a rule that requests for permission are denied if not granted. Asking if one is required to do something amounts to asking permission not to do it. Thus, a negative reply amounts to a positive response to the request. For instance, permission would have been granted had the conversation gone like this:

C Do we have to do these?
T No.
C Then I'm gonna start my reading.

Rejection can be accomplished directly or indirectly. Both kinds of rejection usually include justifications or explanations of the assessment, information to be used in revising the reply. Explicit denial of the proposition expressed in a reply occurs in the following excerpt.

(17) C1 Who said that?
What is i--what does it say?
FW See if you can read it.
C2 Four zippers ( ).
[laugh]
→ C1 It doesn't say that. What does it say?
C3 James. James.
C2 Four zippers, see. Four zippers.
C1 Shut up.
C2 The four babies.
C1 [reading] In the magic music you beautiful wish'd come true.
#
C1 What does it say?

(2 sh, 3-14, 10)

C2 below denies the veracity of the fieldworker's reply and offers an alternative proposition that becomes the answer.

(18) C1 ( ) you spell 'Lana'?
How you spell 'Lana'?
FW ( )-a-n-n-a.
→ C2 Huh uh. 'Lana'?
( ) spells it l-a-n-a.
FW Oh. "Lana," yeah.
C2 Want me to tell ya how many check-pluses I have?

(2p, 2-13, 18)

C2's negative statement immediately following the fieldworker's reply signals that C2 regards the statement as false. C2 then offers a different reply, which is accepted by the other participants. C2 tactfully notes that this is the way one particular person spells the name.

Reiteration of the question after a reply can effect a rejection of a reply, as in C's last utterance in (17) and C2's reiteration in (19).

(19) C2 Miss Driver, how old are you?
FW I'm grown up.
C2 How OLD are you?
FW (I don't tell my age.)
C2 Oh, you look like you 'bout twenty-one.

(2 sh, 3-11, 17)

Knowledge of the order of moves in the preceding exchange is essential to recognition of C2's reiteration as an evaluation move.* Contrastive stress in the replayed question serves two functions: it marks the reply as a reiteration and suggests an explanation for the rejection. The reply in terms of stage-of-life fits the question semantically and syntactically, without providing information the child is seeking. C2's failure to elaborate or clarify the question, along with contrastive stress on "old," suggests that the child expects the hearer already to know that a stage-of-life reply is inappropriate. That information is already obvious. C2's subsequent guess indicates that she wants to elicit the fieldworker's age in years.

The questioners in (20) and (21) point out that the replies are inconsistent with conditions on tasks the children are performing. The children in (20) are working on the floor; their task is to find pictures representing words to fill blanks in sentences they are reading. The questioner maintains that a presupposition of "the" in the sentence to be completed is not true.

(20) C1 Which one should I git, Joe?
C [reading] The cart is on the
C2 TV?
#
→ C There ain't no TV in there.

(2 b, 3-18, 12)

The rejection is based on the fact that the collection of available pictures does not include a picture of a television. Mention of that fact, after the TV has been mentioned only in the reply, indicates that the questioner is responding to the reply. A condition on the reply is violated.

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*Had the fieldworker not offered a reply, the reiteration would be heard as an inserted demand for a response. In both instances the reiterated question indicates no satisfactory reply has been heard.

In (21) the children are trying to find places on a map. C2's use of the criterion "uptown" in the evaluation indicates the questioner (C2) regards it as shared knowledge that they are not looking for some place uptown. Again the questioner's response reflects something in the reply; in this case the rejection is conveyed by stress on "uptown" as well as position in the sequence.*

(21) C2 Where's (I sells)?
C1 ( )
C2 Where?
C Right there.
→ C2 That's UPTOWN.
. . . . [unintelligible]

(2sh, 3-6, 7)

Sometimes a speaker will use an insertion to avoid a direct rejection. The insertions in (22) and (23) concern the truth of the reply.

(22) C1 ( ) (Christie) ( )?
C2 No, she's gonna get 'em tonight.
→ C How do you know?
C2 'Cause that's when I got 'em.
#
C Is this Christie's second time to have chicken pox?

(2 sh, 2-20, 2)

(23) C1 (You use up all this paper right here?)
FW Mmm hmm.
→ C1 Let's see.
. . . . [unintelligible]

(2 sh, 3-11, 25)

Responses such as "Let's see" and "How do you know?" imply that the truth of the reply is in question.** Acceptance or rejection of the reply

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*If "that" were stressed, the evaluation would be an accepting one. The location of the place being looked for would still be a criterion for the evaluation.

**This implied meaning is especially strong in the above utterance, stronger than it is, for instance, in "How did you find out?" In actual usage, "How did you find out?" presupposes that the addressee did in fact learn something; "How do you know?" on the other hand implies that what the speaker said may not be true.

is withheld pending the replier's response to the inserted question. The speakers initiating the insertions question the truth of the offered replies without going so far as to deny their truth. The replier gets an opportunity to defend their statements before an evaluation is made. Thus the process of negotiating an answer can involve insertions as well as reply-evaluation exchanges.

Two facts indicate that rejection is a highly marked reaction to a reply: rejection occurs relatively infrequently, and it is often justified in terms of broad, underlying principles of conversation, especially in terms of the truth of the reply. Rejections based on such principles suggest that the replier is being less than fully cooperative and thus potentially impugn the competence of both replier and evaluator. The children rarely reject replies outright. They more often use insertions or try to elicit more satisfactory replies without rejecting what has been said. The preference for insertions that call into doubt the truth of a proposition over contradictions or explicit rejections suggests that questionable truth value is a touchy problem. The stickiness of the problem suggests that speaking truthfully is a broad and important underlying principle for the children.

A questioner can accept a reply and still express some degree of dissatisfaction with it as an answer for purposes of the sequence. The criteria for satisfaction are more flexible than those for acceptability. The children deal with satisfaction in terms of the kind of responses they expect, need, or want. They may accept an offered reply, but request additional information, as in (2), reproduced here.

(2) C1 How much did it [the tape recorder] cost?
FW It cost a lot.
→ C1 'bout a hundred dollars?
FW Hmmm. No, more than that.
C1 Oh.
C2 A thousand?
FW Nooo.
[laugh]
C2 Less.
C1 Two hundred?
#
Goll.
[end of exchange]

(2 sh, 3-11, 17)

C1's second question indicates that she wants more specific information than is offered at first. It is based on the information offered by the fieldworker; the question thereby conveys acceptance of the reply, while requesting a more specific answer. By offering a hypothesis in terms of round figures, C1 suggests that she is interested in the approximate dollar cost of the recorder. A reply to this question may also answer the first question, either by confirming the hypothesis or by presenting a "correct" amount. The hypothesis is treated as part of a guessing game by the fieldworker, who rejects it. Instead of offering a "correct" figure, the replier gives a hint as to what the next guess should be. C1 accepts the hint ("oh"), but it is C2 who offers the next hypothesis. C1's acceptance of the reply, along with her failure to offer a different hypothesis, suggests that C1 may not have intended to initiate a guessing game, but rather sought to elicit the actual cost of the tape recorder. C1 is not in a position to reject the reply, possibly due to the difference in status between adult and child in a classroom or to the fact that C1 apparently has no idea how much such a tape recorder would cost. But C1 does not yet hear the answer she is seeking, and manages to extend the

interaction. "Two hundred" can be heard as the answer to the original question.

In (24) a girl is asking the fieldworker about notes on a steno pad. The child verifies the information in the reply, then requests additional information.

(24) C2 Who said tha-at?
FW I said "no".
→ C2 You said "no"?
FW Uh huh.
→ C2 "No," but - but what?
FW I shook my head when I said "no".
→ C2 You shook your head when you ( )?
FW Mmm hmm.
C2 And then what does that next one say?

(2 sh, 3-13, 23)

C2's first paraphrase of the first reply indicates that C2 has heard a reply that grammatically fits the initial question. She changes the topic to what else was said. The referent of "what" is understood to be the part of the notes that remains undecoded. The child may be using several kinds of information to conclude that more than "no" is written down. She can see the notes themselves; moreover, her knowledge of rules for negative responses (Driver 1977) may lead the child to think more was probably said. C2 uses "but" to link two different moves. Repetition from the previous reply and the change of topic signal acceptance of the part repeated; nevertheless, the child is not wholly satisfied and requests additional content. Each move accomplishes something different. One move signals a positive evaluation of the reply, the other a negative evaluation, hence the disjunction. It is, in fact, the use of the disjunctive marker that, by signaling a contrast between the first move and the second, makes it clear that the repetition is an accepting move. The excerpt demonstrates that evaluations can be based on criteria other than whether that information is accepted as true. In this case the criteria

appear to have evolved with the sequence, since the questioner's dissatisfaction is not with that part of the reply that syntactically fits the original question, but rather with the additional information included. By exploiting the structure of the inquiry sequence and the expectation that a replier provide the kind of information sought, i.e., that if possible a replier alter his reply in response to a negative evaluation, the child succeeds in extending the interaction while eliciting more information from the adult.

Usually it is the questioner who signals satisfaction or dissatisfaction with an offered reply. An evaluative move may, however, be performed by another participant, as in this conversation about a gauge on a tape recorder. C2's comment signals acceptance of the reply.

(25) C1 Will this go all the way down to there if somebody yells?
#
Real loud?
FW Hmmm?
C1 Go up to there?
FW Mmm hmm.
→ C2 Yeah.

(2 sh, 3-6, 15)

A speaker other than the questioner can also reject the content of a reply, as in (18):

(18) C1 ( ) you spell 'Lana'?
How you spell 'Lana'?
FW ( ) -a-n-n-a.
→ C2 Huh uh. 'Lana'
( ) spells it l-a-n-a.
FW Oh. 'Lana,' yeah.
C2 Want me to tell ya how many check-pluses I have?

(2 p, 2-13, 18)

The replier accepts C2's correction of the content of the reply. Although the fieldworker replies first, C2 provides the propositional content of the actual answer. When C2 successfully introduces a change of topic, the adjusted reply can be seen as the answer. The questioner's

silence is interpreted as acceptance of the reply negotiated by the fieldworker and C2.

In the event the questioner's evaluation follows that of another speaker, the questioner may address his disagreement to either the third speaker or the replier. The third speaker's assessment of the reply would stand as a comment, as in (26). The talk concerns a tape recording the fieldworker is making.

(26) C3 When you're through--when ya--what do you do with it?
FW I go home and listen to it.
→ C2 Oh, you lucky.
→ C3 Yeah, but (you keep 'm/do you put each of them in a thing like that?)
(2 sh, 3-11, 28-29)

The questioner's comment is "the" evaluation. Although the questioner may not be the next to speak after a reply, the evaluation is his prerogative, even when someone else also evaluates the reply. When a non-questioner's evaluation is allowed to stand, we conclude that the questioner is more or less in agreement, as in (25).

In summary, the evaluation slot is essential to the conduct of inquiry sequences. Participants negotiate answers to questions over the course of the reply and evaluation slots. The questioner's contribution to this negotiating process is found in the evaluation. The questioner's reaction is essential to the process of establishing the status of a reply as "answer" or "nonanswer." A reply may be rejected as totally unacceptable, in which case the content of the reply rarely becomes part of the answer. The reply may be acceptable, but not wholly satisfactory, in which case the content of the reply may be seen as part of the answer.

The children do not whimsically demand reworking of replies; a new or modified reply is expected only when the replier knows what the questioner finds unsuitable in the previous reply. When no criterion is made explicit, the replier can often figure out what to change from already-shared knowledge.

The criteria for evaluating a reply are up to the questioner, although certain general considerations, such as truth of the reply and compliance with shared, situation-specific constraints have been identified. The criteria may evolve as the sequence progresses, so that an inquiry sequence can be used to elicit information other than that which is originally asked for. Hence the need for an evaluative move. If the criteria were frozen and known to all in advance, there would be no need for an evaluation, but merely for acknowledgment of an answer.

The children use ambiguity afforded by the structural options available in inquiry sequences to do things in addition to eliciting information. For example, a question that could be interpreted as a request may elicit only an informative reply, whereupon the questioner uses his next turn to make a more explicit request. One analysis is that the more direct request shows that the reply is not wholly satisfactory; on the other hand, the questioner may be expressing satisfaction with the preparatory sequence and simply be initiating a new sequence.

C1's first question in (27) may be treated as either a request to borrow C3's eraser or as a request for information preparatory to making a request.

(27) C1 Curt
C2 Now what is it?
→ C1 You got an eraser?
C2 Yeah.
C1 Could I use it?
C3 I've got an eraser.
. . . . [unintelligible] . . . .

(2 sh, 3-6, 20)

Two interpretations of the order of moves in the above dialog are apparent. One is:

(28) Q1 Now what is it?
Q2 You got an eraser?
R2 Yeah.
E2 Ø [+satisfied]
Q2 Could I use it?

Or, alternatively:

(29) Q Now what is it?
Q2 You got an eraser?
R2 Yeah.
E2 [-satisfied] Could I use it?

Two moves are ambiguous: Q2 and E2. Q2 deals with a condition for the loan: that C2 have an eraser. The sequence accomplishes two things: it eliminates one possible reason for non-compliance with the request, and it prevents the questioner from being seen as making a false assumption. The replier has several appropriate responses open: he may give the eraser to C1, offer to do so, or he may treat the question as a straight information request and nothing more. The second question is ambiguous in terms of the nature of the move: whether it is a request for action or a straight information request.

C1's evaluation is at once polite and ambiguous. Again, the ambiguity lies in what is done, rather than in the existence of two interpretations of propositional content; however, this time the issue is how the second evaluation slot is filled. Also in question is which slot to fill.

If E2 is Ø, we can say that C1 accepts the reply and opens a new exchange with Q3. On the other hand, Q3 can be interpreted as a more direct form of C1's original request, implying dissatisfaction with C2's response. In either analysis, the replier has the opportunity to comply with the request.

The above analysis demonstrates that identifying the kind of move performed does not provide a full account of "what is done" in a turn at speaking. Q3 in the above dialog can easily be seen as a request to borrow a pencil; however, Q3 may be understood to occur in either of two slots. Conversely, two incompatible messages are available for the E2 slot: satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Our understanding of what is going on depends on what we perceive to occur in the evaluation slot; however, the replier is not forced to select one message or the other in order to respond appropriately. Such ambiguity allows participants to accomplish smoothly and without interruption the business of C1 borrowing the eraser from C2. The children maintain the assumption that everyone is a cooperative and competent participant in the interaction. They avoid having to deal openly with a marked situation--rejection of a reply.

The availability of more than one interpretation of events in sequences such as those above serves several functions. Participants can treat the initial question as merely a request for information, thereby avoiding having to deal with a request interpretation. The hearer of the initial question has the chance to anticipate a request and forestall it by offering to do what he expects to be asked or by offering an excuse for noncompliance. Either an excuse for noncompliance is eliminated or participants can circumvent having to remediate a denied

request. If the replier responds with information that indicates he could fulfill the request, but does not offer to do so, the questioner can proceed with a more direct request without having to deal with a misunderstanding.

The analysis presented above bears on several concerns pertinent to the study of interaction. I will discuss considerations relating to the selection of data for analysis, the perspective from which the analysis is undertaken, the use of Ø in discourse, and the usefulness of the notion of adjacency pair for describing conversational exchanges.

A major problem in any investigation is determining what data are to be studied. Decisions about parameters on the data can affect the analysis and the conclusions drawn from it; therefore, when two studies produce different results, the selection of data must be considered as a possible factor.

Question-answer sequences have been defined according to two different criteria. Some researchers (e.g., Mischler 1975, 1974, nd; and Dore 1977) define the exchange to be studied as two successive turns at speaking or as a question and the response elicited. A different approach to the study of questions entails attention to message content in the data selection process. The fit of one utterance to another is considered in delineating parameters of the research. Theoretically, any number of turns at speaking may be included in such a sequence for study. While both approaches rely on the analyst's knowledge of sequential order and both may involve analyses of propositional content and of the functions of language in actual use, they differ with regard to when content and function are to be considered. The difference in approach is also

reflected in the terminology adopted. The definition of question and answer used in this paper is intended to correspond to a functional relationship; other definitions of "answer" often use discourse position as the primary criterion. Although the relationship between questions and the moves that follow them is extremely interesting and warrants further examination, the data above demonstrate that the immediate response in many cases is followed by an answer of a different sort. A reply may occur several moves removed from a question with a variety of kinds of related talk intervening. An analysis of questions and answers limited to relationships between successive turns at speaking, therefore, cannot be expected to capture all of the significant functional relationships between utterances.

Defining the parameters of the study in terms of turn-taking or in terms of number of moves may at first appear to be an experimentally "clean" procedure, less subject to the biases of the analyst or transcriber than consideration of chunks of conversation defined according to more flexible criteria. The methodological issue consists of whether the relationships studied can be understood when they are studied in isolation or whether additional data must be looked at. Coherence in talk, however, is not limited to relationships between successive turns at speaking. Looking only at relationships between successive utterances, therefore, entails the risk of systematically excluding important relationships.

A recent study resulted in the conclusion that five-year-old children provide grammatically-fitting, "canonical" answers to less than half of the questions they are asked. (Dore 1977) It is worthwhile to consider the possibility that differences between Dore's findings and those reported

here may be in part due to the procedures used to select data. The excerpts above indicate that appropriate next-move responses other than canonical answers do not necessarily preclude a canonical answer. In fact, many non-reply responses support the claim that a canonical answer is expected. Empirical investigations are needed to determine whether younger children negotiate inquiry sequences in a manner similar to that described above. There is at present, however, no reason to assume that younger children would use a vastly different process.* It is possible, then, that while Dore's children respond with something other than a canonical response much of the time, those responses are later followed by canonical answers.

The data under consideration also constrain the means available for verifying the analysis and the assumptions on which it is based. The social reality of an analysis can be tested against perceptions of participants in the interaction. Participant interpretations of events are often revealed in talk subsequent to utterances being analyzed. Thus, in order to understand its place in an interaction, the impact of an utterance on subsequent events must be considered. The study of question-response exchanges in isolation, therefore, excludes relationships between subsequent talk and the question-response exchange that might yield additional insights into what children regard as appropriate answers; moreover, the analysis of inquiry sequences presented above makes sense only when one investigates relationships between non-contiguous moves.**

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*The fact that Dore's children talk about the same set of considerations as second graders suggests that they may conduct inquiry sequences in a very similar way.

**One problem with Mischler's work is his failure to consider relationships between moves that do not occur in succession. As a consequence, his analysis does not always pair up questions with utterances that could be reported to be their answers.

Another issue in the study of conversation is the analytical perspective from which interaction is to be studied. Students of interaction do not agree on what the relevant relationships in discourse consist of nor on how they are to be described. Many linguists approach conversation in terms of grammatical properties of utterances and consider situational factors ancillary to syntactic ones. Other students of discourse argue that the relevant axis for analysis is the move (Labov and Fanshel 1977, Goffman 1976). Such an approach starts with an action and looks at how it relates to other actions. The means of accomplishing the action may or may not be studied in detail. The investigation reported here begins from the premise that sequences are to be examined in terms of what is done in a turn at speaking. It is also important to study the formal devices used to realize a move in order to understand the various messages conveyed.*

Second graders are highly sensitive to propositional content, as illustrated by the fact that their verbal responses are closely tied to the literal reading of the question. Answers as I define them often correspond syntactically to a question. Sensitivity to grammatical form is evident in the children's use of what Dore calls equivocality (I have referred to equivocality above as a kind of ambiguity). An equivocal question is a question that "...can receive either a canonical response to its grammatical form or a noncanonical response to its alternate reading" (Dore, p. 150). In other words, it may be interpreted as a request for information, but is also subject to another interpretation. Reiterations can exhibit such equivocality, as do some expressions of dissatisfaction discussed above. While the uncertainty in such exchanges may pose a problem

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*Ethnographic study of the range of devices used to perform specific moves will expand our understanding of the variety of messages conveyed each time one speaks.

for the analyst, eight-year-olds use it as a resource. In many conversations a response to an equivocal move can be interpreted as a response to either reading of the eliciting move. The resulting ambiguity permits participants to save face and to proceed with the interaction without having to perform remediations. Should one interpretation of the utterance entail negative consequences for the speaker, a questioner can almost always retreat to the literal meaning ("I was only asking."). Responsibility for any misinterpretation then rests with the respondent. The use of question forms to perform various moves other than requests for information can depend on their equivocality.*

Given the insights that have been gained from studies using the move as the unit of analysis, and the problems of explanations in terms of grammar alone,** exploration of the usefulness and limitations of the move as a unit of analysis for discourse is needed. Individual moves, however, must be

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*See Driver (1977) for a more extensive discussion of such uses of questions.

**The meanings of "what" and "where" in the two exchanges below are said to overlap, according to the grammatical analysis offered by Dore. If one looks at the exchanges in terms of what is done, the meanings of "what" and "where" are distinct, but the set of ways in which they can be answered overlap.

Q What's a muffet?
A There's a muffet.

Q Where's MY chair?
A This is MY chair. (Dore 1977, p. 152)

The response to the first question may be seen to be an instance of definition by example. The second exchange illustrates the relationship between locatives and deixis. A definite location is indicated by the demonstrative in the response. Understanding how a move is accomplished demands a cataloging of response forms that provide the information and an analysis of the ways in which they do so. One can say that the two types of questions request different types of information. Definition by example may employ deisix, and deixis can indicate location when no other locative expression is used. Thus an analysis of grammar can tell much about how or why an utterance can function the way it does, but analysis of grammar alone does not capture the relationship between reply and question.

understood in terms of a larger sequence, rather than in isolated exchanges; moreover, the lexical, syntactic, and intonation devices selected to perform the move convey significant messages about how the move is to be interpreted.

The analysis presented above depends on the recognition of the use and interpretation of Ø as a move in discourse. As the unmarked sign of acceptance occurring at a specified point in an interaction, Ø corresponds to what is commonly called "tacit approval" in everyday talk. It is important to distinguish Ø from the absence of an expected move. The notion of notable absence implies that something is heard to be missing from a sequence. That speakers hear it this way is evidenced by their efforts to elicit an absent move, by the need to remediate or justify such an absence, and by conclusions to be drawn about the rudeness of the replier or the ineffectiveness of the questioner if the absence is not justified. In contrast to a notable absence, Ø in the evaluation slot is unmarked, cooperative participation with a specific message. Thus, a notable absence differs from Ø with regard to the nature of the conclusions drawn and its effect on subsequent conversation. When Ø is regularly used in a particular discourse slot, the criterion of notable absence is not useful for identifying the slot; however, the interpretability of Ø in that slot as a standard part of the sequence constitutes evidence for the slot as part of the sequence.

The data above also reveal a constraint on the use of Ø as an evaluation. Ø cannot immediately follow a nonaccepting evaluation; moreover, if acceptance is withheld, as, for example, when an insertion occurs after a reply, an answer is only negotiated if (a) a second reply is offered, (b) the original reply is successfully defended, or (c) the questioner cancels the nonaccepting move by verbally accepting the original reply.

Thus, the questioner in (18) is seen to be in accord with the negative assessment offered by C2. When a replier fails to defend or explain a reply which has not been approved as an answer, the question remains unanswered.

Recognition of Ø as a discourse entry necessitates revising the definition of conditional relevance to distinguish Ø from a notable absence. Evidence as to whether participants regard an absence as notable can be found in their behavior when no move is offered and in its interpretation. If Ø is not an available item with a specifiable meaning in the slot and no remediation is offered, the speaker responsible for the slot can be seen as uncooperative.

Question-answer sequences have been cited as the canonical example of adjacency pairs. Because the notion of adjacency pairs reflects a commonsense account of what is going on, it may be particularly useful for defining parameters of conversational data to be examined in studying a conversational sequence. The notion of adjacency pairs describes, in a sense, the constituent structure of an inquiry sequence. It does not, however, correspond to the sequence of moves used to accomplish that work in conversation.

The concept of adjacency pairs suggests a self-contained exchange that can be recognized upon performance of the second pair part. The notion has grown out of an analytical approach concerned with relationships between individual moves. It has been used primarily with data in which speaker reactions are available to the analyst as he performs his task, an after-the-fact interpretation of events. The data above illustrate, however, that structural relationships in conversation are not always

apparent as a move is performed. Participants in conversation must re-examine the organization of moves after subsequent talk has taken place. The data above indicate that the status of an offered reply for participants can be determined only in light of a third slot in the sequence that is essential to the negotiation of an answer. The negotiated nature of conversational structure and the fluid criteria for acceptance or rejection of replies as answers explain the necessity of having a third slot in the sequence. The evaluation serves as more than mere acknowledgement of a reply; it provides the replier with information as to how he himself is to perceive the fit of the reply into the conversation and what he is expected to do next. Additional moves may be required to present and evaluate propositional content not offered in the original reply.

While recognition of the relationships between successive utterances is essential to understanding what goes on in conversation, the notion of adjacency pairs is more appropriate for describing categories of tasks accomplished in a sequence than for describing the set of moves whereby those tasks are accomplished. The contextualized study of exchanges results in a different view of relationships within the exchange to be studied.

It should be noted that the conversations cited above are not notably childlike, nor are they framed as special routines or play, as "child talk" often is. For the most part the conversations occur in spontaneous, everyday classroom transactions. There is, therefore, reason to look for an underlying structure common to question-initiated interactions across the speech community. The data above will become more meaningful as they

are compared to adult conversations and to interactions involving very young children to determine hos age-related factors affect the structuring of conversation, and as the impact of other situational variables is examined.

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